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3535

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1918^a

Rimes
in
Olive Drab

Sergeant John Pierre Roche



Class PS 3535

Book 027R5

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*Go, little book,
You have your "discharge";
Go seek the world—
The public at large;
Go with the tales,
As versed by a "Sarge",
Of our olive drab existence.*

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By Sergeant John Pierre Roche

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RIMES
IN
OLIVE DRAB

By **SERGEANT**
JOHN PIERRE ROCHE



NEW YORK
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1918

PS3535
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**If there is anything in
this little book worthy
of the dedication —**

To my Mother



AUG 29 1918

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no 1

To the American Foreign Legion

God of might, give me the force of an arm
Strong enough to wither when I strike;
God of right, keep me freed from harm
That I may die as I should like.

I ask no craven's freedom from the toll
Of the legions marching towards the night,
But when my name is added to the scroll,
Grant I have struck and struck with might.

God of might, save me from a weakling's spleen,
Give me the chance to strike as does a man—
Not as a cog in a drilled machine,
But in single fury as a freeman can.

God of right, do not keep me long
From skulking death, if it lie in wait.
Lord, let me shout in Victory's song,
Or be swept aside by an equal hate.

*God of might, hear my plea;
Keep me not from the strife and fray;
Let me strike, O God of right,
This very day, this very day!*

A Polish Alliance

Romance has come into my life
And come its way a-winging;
Elusive sprite so often sought,
And so my heart is singing.
I never thought that I should meet
My fate while clad in khaki,
Because, remodel as you may,
This issue stuff is tacky;
But love is here and here to stay,
To have and hold unending—
I'll woo and win this latest love
Against the world contending.

No Norman maid has found her way
Into my heart's abysses;
No English girl has made me hers;
In fact, no foreign misses
Could claim the niche that this love owns
Who makes my life so zestful,
And yet I'll say my new love's name
Is in a way distressful.
I only hope my love's returned,
He's but a simple rookie—
A former Harvey chef who's now
Warsinski, our new "cookie"!

To a Crowd in a Cabaret

The flash of flesh and shaded lights,
The crack of corks and glutton's fare;
The fog of smoke and laughter shrill:
Is it for these that we prepare?

The shift of feet and rhythmic beat
Of banjo, drums and saxaphones,
With swaying forms in serried throng:
Is it for these that France atones?

The preening glance and rounder's stare,
The whirl and swirl of song and dance;
"To jazz and jest!" with brimming glass:
Is it for these they die in France?

A Year From Now

There is a pine tree
Standing in the moonlight
Where, from my tent,
I can see it lift its head
Against the sky,
Standing guard over men
Who, a year from now,
May know such beauty
Only through the voice
Of others.

Down the Company street
A Victrola is playing—
Julia Claussen is singing
An aria from "Samson and Delilah"
Yet, a year from now,
Those listening men
May hear only
The wobbling hiss
Of gas shells.

In a tent across the way,
A crowd of rookies
Are singing
"Good-bye Broadway—Hello France"
With great gusto;
And yet, a year from now,
Those fresh young voices
May be mute.

To a Violinist

(now a "buck private")

The throbbing tone of a violin
With the tingling thrill of the concert hall,
Played to a group in a trooper's tent,
To ears attuned to a bugle call;
A melody wrung by his fleeting bow
With master touch and facile ease,
To wing its way through the flapping walls—
A Kreisler Caprice—his "Viennese".

As his fingers stop on the lilting strings
To touch a note to glowing life,
It seems to be unthinking waste
To pledge this gift in futile strife—
A genius risked against a shell,
A talent thrown without a thought
On scales now bent with human weight—
Is peace to be so dearly bought?

To our Indulgent Friends

*"Today I got your letter,
Saying that a sweater
Was on its way to me"—*

*(This makes the fifth that's flitting
Our way from angels knitting
For those to cross the sea)*

*"The wristlets are essential"—
(And yet a penitential
Feeling fills our breast,
To think that we have seven,
Or maybe it's eleven,
Already in our chest)*

*"The 'cigs' are just a blessing"—
(Emotions quite distressing
Confound us as we think
Of "smokes" beyond computing,
And all the artful looting
We've done with pen and ink)*

The things they send to rookies,
From sleeping bags to cookies,
They come on every mail.
A ton of stuff we're stacking,
And when it comes to packing
We'll have to hold a sale.

L'ENVOI

*Kind friends, accept our thanks,
But General Orders say
A hundred pounds is all
That we may take away;
So kindly, if you will,
Abstain from an addition
To what we have, until
We get a Lieut's commission.*

The Latest Horror of War

"Two hundred delegates to the Middlesex County W. C. T. U. assembled for their annual meeting in the First Baptist Church at Watertown adopted resolutions condemning the practice of sending gifts of tobacco to soldiers and sailors. Dr. Louis Rand of Newton, who presented the resolutions, spoke of the injurious effects of tobacco and urged the women to send books instead."—News Item.

It's mighty nice to know,
When muck you're wading through,
That your health is in the hands
Of watchful ladies, who
Are hep that nicotine
Is worse than German spleen
And are shipping books for you
To the land of parlez-vous.

When frozen to the waist
By a wind that's whistling keen,
There's nothing quite so sweet
As a book by Laura Jean;
When shells are whizzing past,
A Chambers, yes, his last,
Or Anna Katherine Green,
Will brighten up the scene.

When sleeping in the rain
Although the light is dim,
Just read a page or two
In "They" or maybe "Kim";
And when gassed by nitric shells
With every breath a stab,
Try some of James' gab,
Pick up "The Book of Kells"
Or the latest thing by Wells!

L'ENVOI

Listen, ladies, there's cussing enough in the army now, but if you want the boys to put some real pep in their profanity, just keep on powwowing about your dream of a smokeless army reading Browning and Shaw. The solacing whiff of a "cig" isn't such a hell of a lot to give to a man expected to kill or be killed; and you never saw a bunch of soldiers try to take your tea away and yet you hit the feathers early, get your three squares on a china plate and don't have to mount guard or do "kitchen police"; to say nothing of hiking, drilling or going over the top. It is silly to yap about the baneful effects of nicotine upon a pair of lungs that ten seconds after the last "drag" on a cigarette may be blown to blazes. It's too bad to have to talk this way to a lot of ladies who have been raised nice, and who have good ideas on how to run a Sunday school, but when you think that some day our men over there may be feeding the hungry maw of a machine gun, with their tongues hanging out for a smoke, and not get it, just because a lot of hearth-warmers somewhere in Massachusetts framed up a nutty resolution, you can't blame us for treating you rough, can you?

The White Feather

When England asked her sons
To take up arms again,
One brother said good-bye
At dawn in the drizzling rain;
And his step on the creaking stair
Will never echo there

Again. Before he left
He sat at his desk and wrote
To his brother in the States—
A simple, scrawling note
To the brother who had spent
His youth with him—and sent

It overseas. He wrote:
“You know our plighted word
To stand as one and fight,
No matter what occurred—
And now we see the day
We sought in boyish play,

So come.” The letter sped
Across the seas, and he
Went out, as gentry do,
In all fidelity
To wait for the rendezvous—
To wait and wonder, too.

He went and played the game,
As any Eton lad
Is taught to play, and stayed
To give the best he had,
Feeling that their troth
Would surely bind them both;

And then his answer came
From the brother overseas:
He regretted—yes—and yet,
So understand him please!

.....
But his brother only knew
That he must serve for two.

Through two campaigns he went,
To see his comrades die;
And then in the Dardanelles
He met the Reaper's eye—
And died in the drizzling rain,
Crushed and torn with pain.

To the brother overseas
Came a letter from the dead—
Found in a steely grip,
Its corners tinged with red—
And when he tore the flap
No writing met his sight,
But on the floor there fell
A single feather—*white!*

Honorably Discharged

With the pallor
Of the hospital
In their thin cheeks—
Dull-eyed and insecure
Of step, they come
With their discharges.

Freed from the internment
Of the base hospital,
Foot-loose to go
Where they will;
To the hubbub of the city,
To office or lathe,
Or to the even days
Of life in Vandalia,
Or Cairo or Belvidere—
Their journey ended
Before its beginning.

With the surgeon's indictment
In their hands,
They sag against the wall—
The salvage of War.

Carpe Diem

Out from the House of Life into the Night of Chance
To walk untrodden ways as toys of Circumstance.

*What does the morrow hold?
Who can tell—who shall say
When reckoned by a score
We total day by day.*

Through labyrinths unknown we stumble, plunge ahead,
And some will pass unhurt while others greet the dead.

*What does the scorer say?
Why try to answer yet—
We will not be afraid
Until the Thing is met.*

We find in us the key to sacrifices new,
So when we meet with death, it may be simple, too.

*What does the cryptic read?
Conjecture as you may—
Come link arms with Life;
Live gladly for today!*

Trains

Over thousands of miles
Of shining steel rails,
Past green and red semaphores
And unheeding flagmen,
Trains are running,
Trains, trains, trains.

Rattling through tunnels
And clicking by way stations,
Curving through hills, past timber,
Out into the open places,
Flashing past silos and barns
And whole villages,
Until finally they echo
Against the squat factories
That line the approach to the cities.

Trains, trains, trains
With the fire boxes wide open,
Giant Moguls and old-time Baldwins
And oil-burners on the Southern Pacific,
Fire boxes wide open
Flaring against the night,
Like a tremendous watch fire
Where the sentries cluster at their post.

Trains, trains, trains
Serpentine strings of cars
Loaded with boys and men—
The legion of the ten-year span
To whom has been given the task
Of seeking the Great Adventure.

Swaying through the North and South,
And East and West,
Freighted with the Willing
And the Unwilling;
Packed with the Thinking
And the Unthinking,
Pushing on to the Unknown
Away from the shelter and security
Of the accustomed into the Great Adventure.

Trains, trains, trains
With their coach sides scrawled
With chalked bravado and, sometimes,
With their windows black
With yelling boys,
In open-mouthed exultation
That they do not feel,
Rushing further and further
From the known into the unseeable.

Trains, trains, trains
With sky-larking boys in khaki,
Munching sandwiches and drinking pop;
Or, tired and without their depot swagger,
Curled up on the red-plush seats;
Or asleep, with a stranger, in the Pullmans.

They rush past our camp,
Which lies against the railroad,
With the crossing alarm jangling caution
And fade into the dust or night,
Leaving us to conjecture where
As they have left others to wonder—
As they must wonder themselves
When they are done
With the shouting and hand-shaking
And kissing and hat-waving and singing.

Trains, trains, trains
Clicking on into unforecasted days—
Away from the shelter and security
Of the accustomed into the Great Adventure.

On Guard

A cloudless sky of peaceful stars
Above a camp in tranquil rest;
The keen wind stirs the pine trees,
And the white road stretches on
Like a path to the warring world.

Halt! Who goes there?

Was it nothing but the wind?
There is a shadow on the grass
And the crunch of brush underfoot.

Advance, friend, and be recognized!

*Let us see the Future's face:
See if it is friend or foe;
Let us tear its mask away—
If this is Fate, then tell us so!*

Mike Dillon, Doughboy

Mike Dillon was a doughboy
and wore the issue stuff;
He wasn't much to look at—
in fact, was rather rough;
He served his time as rookie—
at drilling in the sun,
And cleared a lot of timber
and polished up his gun.

Mike Dillon was a private
with all the word entails;
He cussed and chewed tobacco
and overlooked his nails.
You never saw Mike Dillon
at dances ultra nice;
In fact, inspection found him
enjoying body lice.

If Mike had married money
or had a little drag,
He might have got a brevet
and missed a little "fag";
But as a social figure
he simply wasn't there—
So Mike continued drilling
and knifing up his fare.

In course of time they shipped 'em
and shipped 'em over where
A man like Mike can sidestep
the frigid social stare,
And do the job of soldier
without the fancy frills,
And keep a steady footing
in the pace that really kills.

Now Mike did nothing special;
he only did his best:
He stuck and "went on over"—
and got it in the chest;
Played it fair and squarely
without a social air,
And Mike is now in Heaven
and at least a Corporal there!

The 108th Engineers Passes

The staccato of drums,
Beat upon beat;
Lines of legs
That flash apart
And close again
To flash apart
In swinging step;
The crisp fanfare
Of strident bugles
Above the sharp crash
Of drums;
Rifles a-slant,
With bayonets
A single flash in the sun.
A blotch of red
On an orderly's arm—
The splash of colors
Against the dust,
And legs flashing
As one.....

Down the road
The dull beat
Of drums
And the fading cadence
Of bugles.

Life as a Gage You Flung

There in an alien land,
Lie quietly,
Alien no longer now
For you and me;
Fragrant the thoughts of you,
Rare was your soul;
Life as a gage you flung,
Facing the goal.

Life as a gage you flung,
Flung as a rose;
Gave it as gentry do,
Gladly to those
Who gave their glowing youth
Gladly as you.
Live in the heart of me—
I gave you, too.

With Guidons Flying Red

Into the clouds of stifling dust
With guidons flying red;
With trombone and trumpet
Flashing through the mirage,
Leading the shadowy silhouette
Of horsemen riding on
Into the swirling dust;
With the sea-beat of caissons,
A deeper note against
The shouts of command
And clattering hoof beats,
The Battery goes.

Into the clouds of swirling dust—
Choking, sight-blearing dust—
A-top of jolting caissons
Which rumble on relentlessly
Until the silhouette is blurred
And gone—gone with the gleam of silver
And guidons flying red.

Into the clouds of whirling dust
Goes the Battery on its hike,
And back through the dust
It will come—with the grumble
Of caissons and clatter
Of hoof beats and shouted commands;
With trombone and trumpet
Gleaming at the column's head.

But some dull morning,
Into the mire of Flanders Field
(Instead of the dust of this mimic march)
With no guidons flying red
And no silver gleam at the column's head,
The Battery will go—
A shadowy silhouette
Of horsemen riding on.

The Mystery of the Mess Fund

A cussing crew of "truckies" fetched from
San Antone

Where God Almighty's sunshine burned 'em
to the bone;

A fighting bunch of reg'lars shooting craps
and Mex,

And driving o. d. Packards through mud
above their necks.

When messing all together down in San
Antone,

They had a whoppin' mess fund (each com-
pany has its own);

Then orders came to leave there; so they
cut the crew in twain

And some drove up to Houston and some
went east by train.

But the bunch that hit it eastwards took the
fund along,
While the crew that came to Houston found
the money gone;
So somewhere on Long Island a crew is
messaging right,
While somewhere down in Texas a crew is
nursing spite.

L'ENVOI

Now I'm not exactly yellow,
But I'd still donate my chance
Of standing within gunshot
When those "truckies" meet in France.

"You Were So White, So Soft"

I knew your gentle touch
Through all those many years—
Unheeding then, but now
How memory endears
That golden span of time
And makes me wish anew
That, since you could not come,
I might have stayed with you.

We said good-bye, and yet
I went without a thought
Of what my going meant,
Or how you held me taut;
And yet the thought of you
Each night repose defeats—
Ah, would I knew again
The luxury of sheets!

To F. K. M.

The earth lies stark in its dreary shroud,
As dead as the buds that flowered May.
The moon is wrapped in a fleeing cloud;
O, for the song of your voice!

*You had love in your voice
So thrillingly true,
That the pipes of Pan
Were an echo of you!*

My heart grows cold in fright of the blast,
Like the cry of a loon in a haunted house
Is the voice of the wind as it rushes past;
O, for the touch of your hand!

*You had June in your heart
And beauty so rare,
That the roses of God
Bent low in despair!*

My soul is numbed by the chill of the night;
A lonely mourner on a lonely hill,
I stand and watch a phantom light;
O, for the warmth of your lips!

To a Baneful Bugler

We know a bugle's hard to play—
Unlike a ukelele,
It's not picked up by everyone—
And though you practice daily,
We cannot help but feel at times
(If we may trust our hearing)
That you should hold another job
And not be bugleering.

A bugle at its best is not
A treat for aural senses,
Besides you know that any call
Which routs us from our tents is
Regarded as an overt act;
So kindly when you're playing,
Desist from flatting all the notes—
Your "blues" are most dismaying.

You wake us up at dawn;
You snuff our lights at night;
You pipe us into mess,
And your pitch is seldom right—
So pardon us for saying
That often when you're playing
We wish that you had felt
You were too proud to fight!

The Thread of Life

When the thread of Life is drawn out taut,
And Death lies down with you,
You come to see your fellowman
From a different point of view;
You come to find in a bunkie's heart
A scar that's deep and red,
And to clasp his hand as a brother would
With mighty little said.

When you've reckoned life in terms of years
And it comes to counting days,
You throw away the surface grit
And work the lode that pays.
On a killing hike through dust or mud,
When you pull at the same canteen—
By God, it makes a man of you,
Or something mighty mean!

You find yourself by losing self
And learn to sweat and grin;
To bear the brunt of circumstance—
To shun the one great sin
Of slinking back or quitting
Before the job is through;
And while you count each day as lost,
It's moulding, *making* you!

The American Army

Our fighting men we deem
To be composed of Brown,
And Smith and Black and Jones
And White—and so on down
The lengthy list of those
Conventional monickers;
And yet the pay roll shows
Our martial force to be
A mighty melting pot
That boasts among the lot
Some handles quaint as these:
Michael Spryszyriski, Stanislaw
Katarskis, Alexander Kvederis,
Joseph Luchinskis, Jan
Trozonowicz, John Zygmunt,
Anton Yowisc, Campioni
Eucarpio, Guiseppi Del Vecchio.

Our Nation's fathers, who
Upheld a fledgling cause,
Would find it quite a task
For their untutored jaws,
To call the muster rolls
And stutter over names
Of Croations, Greeks and Poles,
And appellations of
Hungarians and "wops,"
Until endeavor stops

At stumbling blocks like these:
Rode Burmudzya, Tony
Karpankas, Vincenzo Zawelsky,
Zajoc Fronciszek, Woclaw
Kivikowski, Valeri Valeriano,
Alkie Gozazialski, Wojceich
Czajka, Ignazio Digangelioa.

Yet though a score of "skis"
Occur for every Jones,
And though the company clerk
Espies their length and groans—
When bugles blow parade
And medals are bestowed,
A nation's accolade
May rest upon the straps
Of these same "hunkies" whose
Dire consonants abuse
Our ears—the honor list of:
Adam Blasczcyński, Paul
Ciszewski, Steve Czarmiski,
Ernst Grantkowski, Alex
Kwiatkowski, Micyslaw Machedweski,
Kasimir Skupniewicz, Max
Skarbonkiewicz, Xenephon Chmileszki.

Away

From the silent street
Comes the beat of feet,
Dawn and the rain.
Hushed the city's voice,
Quiet the drums;
You are going down—
Down to entrain.

Gone—and I bereft,
Take the love you left—
Hold it as mine;
Love that I could give
Only to you—
Love that I will keep
Amarynthine.

In Praise of Paper Plates

In ante-bellum days
When living as a "civ,"
We used to wonder at
A woman's faint procliv-
ity for doing dishes.

But, since we wash our kit,
We've come to know the wishes
For freedom it engenders
Among the home defenders.

We've done it many times
In quite a cheerful mood,
But other meals it took
Our appetite for food
To sense the task awaiting—
To know it was our chore
When done with masticating.
It's the deadly repetition
That spoils your disposition.

So now we view the job
The same as housewives do;
And you can rest assured
That when this war is through,
If we should go a-courting
And do a Lohengrin,
If a maid we can't be sporting
We will, by all the Fates,
Resort to paper plates!

The Incinerator

Every once in a while
I see a "kitchen police"
At the incinerator
Shoveling up tin cans.
They are not the sort of tin cans
You see on the shelves
Of a grocery store—
Their fancy colored labels
Are gone and only
The charred tinplate itself
Is left, battered and hammered
Past recognition—
All according to the regulations
Duly enforced by the Sanitary Officer.

And every time I pass
A man in khaki
Near a mess shack,
Shoveling up
Those bent and broken tins,
I think of other boys in khaki—
With puttees shined,
And creased breeches,
And starched blouses,
And gay hat cords—
Waiting like bright-colored tins
On a grocer's shelves,
With War standing
Shovel in hand
At the incinerator.

Christmas Furloughs

The C. O.* put the letter down,
Whose wording military
Was just the same as many more,
And said, "It seems a very
Peculiar thing that at this time
The health of loving parents
Should prove to give such grave alarm
That they require their Terence,
Or John or James or Theodore
To come at once—"if not before'."

And as he spoke, he paused to note
The application's dating,
And you could see the C. O. was
Quite sagely estimating
That ten days leave was just enough
To span the gala season
Of Christmas-tide at home with them;—
And then he knew the reason
Was just an epidemic of
Lonely boys and mother-love.

*C. O. is the common abbreviation for Commanding Officer.

More Horrors of War

No. 1

The almost tenor
Who is always going over the top
Note of his range,
And insists on singing in the shower
When you're all lathered up
And can't retreat—
Or in the "jit" going to town
Which is anguishing enough,
Lord knows,
Without having to listen
To "Sw-e-et Ad-e-line,"
Accompanied by a fanfare
Of spring squeaks and body rattles.

No. 2

The correspondent
Who begins her letter,
"Well, how do you like the army
By this time?"
And then goes on to say
She doesn't understand
Why you haven't written her,
Because one must have
A lot of time in the army,
So she will expect a long letter
In the very near future—
And closes with
"I do hope the war will soon be over!"

No. 3

The rookie with the ukelele
Who has decided to take up music
To help his tentmates
Pass the lonely hours,
And who plays "Joan of Arc"
In a way that would start
The French Revolution
All over again,
And who gets up at daylight
On Sunday mornings—
When you don't have to fall out
For reveille—
To practice the new music
His sister sent him—
A new piece called
"My Rosary."

No. 4

The laundryman who sends back
Your best khaki suit,
Looking like the fake marble paper
They use in apartment buildings,
And who shrinks an o. d. shirt
Till it looks like a chest protector,
And then doesn't bring back
Your stuff until Tuesday
When you have a date
With the Mustering Officer of the Division
For nine o'clock Sunday morning.

The Food I Left Behind Me

We heard today from one among
The very first to cross the sea.
“I’ve slept in the rain and mud,” he said,
“Where candles are a luxury.
Though it may be that your reply
To this will never find me,
I only know of one regret—
The food I left behind me!

“I’ve slept with rats in crater holes—
I’ve sniffed the gases—fought the lice—
I’ve passed up sleep and passed up smokes,
The thousand things you sacrifice;
But here I stay to see it through.
There’s just one tie to bind me
To the life I lived so long ago—
The food I left behind me!

**"To think of salads, steaks and chops,
Potatoes, pie and savory fish
I left upon my dinner plate!
I often wish I had some dish
I spurned in the past whose very sight
Today would nearly blind me—
Would I had what waiters got
Of the food I left behind me!**

**"Those plates of luscious edibles
I nibbled at and pushed away—
Now rise again like steaming wraiths
And haunt me every eatless day.
Oh, someone send me kindly
A table d'hôte allowance of
The food I left behind me!"**

Gone

**Gone
Are the lull
Of your voice
And the play
Of your white hands
Against your hair.**

**Gone
The slenderness
And youth of you—
The silken tracery
Of your loveliness.**

**Gone
Your eager lips
And the cool warmth
Of your slender fingers.**

**Only
Your letter before me
Saying again and again,
“I love you!”**

Camp . . . at Night

The night comes down with a sweep of stars,
And through the pines the tents aglow
Like giant jack o'lanterns gleam.

The grey mists rise—a scarf of tulle—
While shadow forms pass to and fro
The flare of fire at the sentry post.

The lonely songs in doubtful key—
The thrumming whirr of an aeroplane

The growing still lights out and "Taps."

Nobody Realizes How Serious It Is

We went to town in a jitney bus,
And the "civ" who shared a seat with us
Began to chat about the war,
As many "civs" have done before—
And the text of his talk was mostly this:

*"I was telling some of the boys
last night that nobody in this
country realizes how serious
this war is, and they won't,
either, until some of our boys
get shot over there and we see
their names in the paper."*

We stopped at an "approved" cafe,
To dine in a frugal, Hoover way,
And our vis-a-vis soon broke the ice
To give the Staff some sage advice—
But the gist of his speech was mostly this:

*"I was just telling the Mrs.
this morning that nobody in
this country realizes how
serious this war is, and they
won't, either, until some of
our boys get shot over there
and we see their names in the
paper."*

We went to dance in a khaki crush,
And above the din of social gush,
We heard a flapper's cooing tones
As she told her partner, Sargint Jones,
The throbbing thought in her marcelled head:

*"I was just telling Betty
this afternoon, when I had
tea with her, that nobody in
this country realizes how
serious this war is, and they
won't, either, until some of
our boys get shot over there
and we see their names in the
paper."*

It's Awful Far from My Folks

A national army rookie—
A city stoop in his back
And eyes of helpless wonder—
Against the company shack;
Come with a train of others,
Passed through the draft machine,
Shipped from the camp at Rockford
To face this new unseen.
We put the bromide query,
“How do you like it here
In the land of Texas sun and ‘smokes’?”
“I think it’s fine,” he answered,
“But it’s awful far from my folks.”

So we lit a “hump” and passed ’em
And asked about the “chow”;
Inquired if he hadn’t noticed
He was feeding better now;
Prognosticated weather
Like a tourist folder tells,
And opined that digging trenches
And dodging dummy shells
Was hell, compared to sitting
In the Q. M. soling shoes.
He nods and speaks in sort of chokes:
“You’ve got it right about the place,
But it’s awful far from my folks.”

He reached in his khaki breeches
And tightened up his mouth,
“A letter my brother sent me
Before we started south.”
So I read the scrawly writing—
They all were worried sick
And hoped he’d get a furlough
And see them mighty quick.
“We’ll soon be going over,
And—of course a guy may live,
Or—well, even if he croaks,
It ain’t that I’m afraid to go—
But it’s awful far from my folks.”

A Form of Conservation

A General Order says
To put our "putts" away;
And so it's taps for them.
Regret it as we may,
An order is an order—
It's canvas from today.

Until the blow was met
We seldom gave a thought
To what they meant to us—
But since the havoc's wrought,
We know in Mars' apparel
We figure as a nought.

We think of selling them
But always we defer
The date—the thought of them
Adorning some chauffeur
Sets our finer feelings
Throbbing in demur.

And so we pack them with
The pictures of our kin,
And when at last they still
The awful martial din
We'll use our leather "putts"
To bind these verses in!

A Gay Night

Through the mud and rain
To town—to a “movie”
Where the organ notes
Fall as soothingly
As a shower on a tin roof.

To a “movie”
Where people live and love
In houses—in rooms,
Where there are lounge chairs,
And pictures on the walls,
And long shelves of books.

To a “movie”
Where the beauty
Of Elsie Ferguson
Comes as an apparition—
Woman incarnate.

And then back to camp
Through rain and mud,
To huddle in your non-uniform blankets
While the rain trickles through
The spark-holes in the canvas.

From the Warmth of Wonted Days

Away from the warmth
Of wonted days
And the glow and thrill
Of the flowing crowd—
A pushing tide
With driftwood faces,
Swift of lure—
Faces we come upon
In the nitrogen glare
Of shop windows,
To lose a moment later
In the shadows and shove.

Away from the elbow-rubbing
Of the hotel lobby
With its flow of activity
And lounging onlookers;
With bell-boys wriggling
Through the press, paging
This name and that—
With groups of men
In khaki and serge;
With salesmen scurrying
For their trains,
While from the cafe
And the mezzanine
Comes the mingled echo
Of ragtime and Mimi's song.

Away from the organ notes
Of the "movie"—from Hart
And Douglas Fairbanks
And Norma Talmadge;
Away from the jazz patriotics
Of vaudeville—its dogs
And dancers and acrobats.

Away from the clasp
Of friendly hands
And the welcome voices
We have known so well
And yet known so little.

Gone are the glow
And life—the warmth
Of newly wonted days.

Written in the Fall of 1917 when it was rumored the 33rd
Division would soon leave Houston for an eastern point of
embarkation.

A Burning Issue

If you've kept a Q. M. warehouse with all its
varied store
Of bacon, corn and syrup bulging out the door,
You know that promptly monthly you close it
for the day,
To figure up your reckoning with the U. S. A.

If a man's been awful careful to get a Sergeant's
eye
For all the stuff he's issued, he ain't so apt to die
When he comes to prove his record; but even
then you'll see
That a lot of stuff is "debit" where a "credit"
ought to be.

Now in Luzon on the Islands the sun is hellish
hot,
And your stock is apt to shrivel, shrink or go to
rot,
And the Q. M.'s who were out there were good at
figuring bad,
So the books were in a tangle—very, very sad.

So the chief civilian clerkie, telling at a glance
That the wayward little depot didn't have a
chance

To reconcile its books and wipe its slate up clean,
Did a little quiet thinking and used some kero-
sene.

The night the chief got busy came a little breeze,
And the fire wiped out the depot pretty as you
please;

And to show you that suspicion didn't even lurk,
The chief was recommended for fearless rescue
work.

To "The Army Tailor"

Shirts O. D. I brought
To your studio—
Sleeves that met my wrists
In the long ago,

But not now;
Shrunk by laundries vile,
'Til they hit me where
They were just the length
Debutantes might wear
To a dance.

You, with magic shears,
Eked them down anew—
Amputated tail,
Hidden from the view,
Was the trick.

So with breeches tight—
Fitted to a size
Where I breathed without
Hastening my demise,
As it were.

Collars' scrawny height
You, with baffling skill,
Raised to fit my neck;
So I swear until
I am dumb

I will sing your praise—
Twang without the mute—
Sing the only rift
In the awful lute
Of misfits.

General Byng and Private Bang

The King is duly proud
(The morning papers tell us)
Of the newest Flemish drive,
Accomplished by the zealous
Lieutenant-General Byng.
So, struck by admiration,
His Highness grabs his pen
And tells the English nation
He thinks so much of Byng,
He's making him a General—
To show his great esteem
Is more than just ephemeral.
But as we read the news
About the King's elation,
We noted with concern—
Right after its narration—
The toll of British dead.
The count was not specific,
But as you read you knew
It must have been terrific.
Of those who gave their lives
There wasn't any mention;
And while we credit George
With excellent intention,
It just occurred to us,
While the praise of Byng he sang,
If he gave a passing thought
To the fate of Private Bang.

To James Alfred Gillespie

January 20, 1918

Though you are gone,
It is no simpler now
To voice the love I knew
Or find in fragrant words
A threnody for you.
Mute as comrades are
Whose pledge of faith is dumb,
I find when I would speak
The phrases do not come.

When you were here
We never put in words
The kinship so unsought;
As a silent garden rose
Might flower without thought
To fade in the day's grey hush,
It grew so straight and tall
We did not see the menace
In the shadows from the wall.

So quick to give;
Your willingness to serve,
So fraught with fine intent,
Became the gift of life—
And what your going meant
I know but cannot say.

The Sanitary Train

Down the pine-fringed lane
Comes the sanitary train,
A long line of o. d. trucks
Close on the other's tailboard—
A lengthening streak of drab
Against the green trees.

Truck after truck winds into
The grey stretch of road;
And where the exhaust spits out,
Clouds of dust rise like smoke puffs.

Sharp in the brilliant sunlight
Are swaying figures of men,
Jostling one another
As the lorries lurch along—
And the rumble of them
Is like the distant pound of surf.

Still they twist into the road—
A long frieze against a blue drop,
A lumbering line of retrievers
To fetch back the hulks of men.

Lines to a Wrist Watch

I chaffed as others did
And flung a festive *mot*
But that, my falcon true,
Was in the long ago
When time was mine
To give or lend or spend
—Before a bugle call
Became the bitter end
Of a perfect sleep.

I used to think it quaint
That meters of the trist
Should dare expose their face
Upon a manly wrist.
But that was long ago,
Before I ever knew
A sergeant's awful wrath
Or what he says to you
When you are late.

It's easy as a "civ"

**To lean on frequent clocks
And snatch the fleeting time—**

**That's why the townsman mocks
The watch that lives its days**

**Affixed to someone's wrist;
But when it comes to U. S.**

**You're first upon the list
Of Johnny Gun.**

To know your cheery glow;

**To see your steady hands
Tick off the weary hours—**

**The slowly running sands
That trickle through the glass**

**Of Time and speed its span—
Is to come to think of you**

**As a comrade and a man,
You pal o' mine!**

Coming Back From the Range

Dust and heavy legs,
Dust and stinging feet,
Dust and throats a-thirst,
And voices singing
Several songs at once,
Rising, mingling as the dust—
*"We'll walk a mile
And rest a while,
We're sixteen miles from home."*
—— *"Glorious, glorious.
One bottle of beer for the four of us."*
*"Huck-el-berry Finn
—— el-berry Finn."*
— *"until it's over
Over there!"*
Rifles every whichway
And sagging shoulders;
The rustle and swish
Of feet dragging in route step,
With now and then
The cocoanut shell clatter
Of horses' hoofbeats,
And the mingling of other songs—
Fresh choruses that belie
The fatigue and weariness
Of the dust-ridden straggling column
Of blue-denim doughboys.

War Brides

Jack Thompson went to a training camp,
As a lot of fellows did,
And took the course of martial sprouts
And did as he was bid.
He learned the drill and got his fill
Of devious ways of killing,
And met a girl and in a whirl
He asked and found her willing.

They only met for a minute's span—
They only loved for a day,
But Mars and Cupid urged them on
And no one bade them stay.
He was a Lieut. and she was cute
And after frenzied wooing,
With a mutual thrill, they said "I will,"
As everyone was doing.

Jack Thompson went with his regiment
And passed through fight and fire,
And aged a year with every week
He lived in Flanders' mire.
He came back home with an older "dome"
To find the lady waiting,
Still white and pink, but she couldn't think—
So beware of hasty mating!

If

If I should die
My little death,
Think then of me;
And let the tears
You shed become
My threnody.

I would live on
To know your love
And press your lips;
But Fate drives hard,
With tightened curb,
And whips and whips!

Jitney Problem Solved

Coming in from Camp
In a ramping jitney bus
We note our driver's work
And it occurs to us
That it's a dire mistake
To lose this Lochinvar
When we could commandeer
His genius for a star
Of aviation.

We know the acid test
They give to every man,
We know they try his nerve
By every trick they can;
And still we feel secure
In saying we should take
This Jehu of the road
And, ipso facto, make
A daring pilot.

To see him miss a Hunk
By a fraction of an inch
Or brush a trolley car
Or "civ" and never flinch
Makes it seem a shame
To think this genius runs
A "Jit"—oh, why not use
His skill against the Huns?
He'd surely strafe them.

L'ENVOI

O General Staff, please
Send him far
Across the sea
And keep our streets
Inviolable for
Democracy.

Conscripts of Destiny

"The Conscripts of Destiny"—
We find the phrase
Staring from the page.

Are we all—
Selected men or volunteers—
Merely the conscripts
Of Fate?

Is our will—
The individualism
We, in the past,
Husbanded so—
Enlisted, like our legs and arms,
For the term of the crisis?

Can we suffer
The subordination of self
And become cog-like
In the intricacies
Of the imperfectly working machine,
And yet escape
The discontent
Which fills us all
When,
Like pins on a map,
We cannot understand
The scheme of the whole?

Are we all—
Selected men or volunteers—
The conscripts of Fate,
Or are we willing
To serve humbly—
To suffer and bear
With the toll of Circumstance—
And still keep before us
The vision of serving?

Home on Furlough

I'm going back to blighty
To rest in a "civvy" bed—
Away from bugles' warning,
Where I can lay my head
And stretch my limbs on linen
To sleep until I wake,
And eat the sort of pastry
That mother used to bake.

I'm going back to blighty—
To hearts that all salaam
To me as to a Colonel
And not the "buck" I am;
I'm going back in triumph
To waiting arms and cheer—
To all that's home and mother,
To everything that's dear.

I'm going back to blighty—
I'll be there mighty soon,
And how my heart is singing
With "Home, Sweet Home" attune—
It sings with the engine's whistle,
It sings with the clicking rails,
For blighty's always blighty,
And blighty never fails.

In the Shower

Muscles rippling
Under the dripping flesh
Of stripped men,
Figures of unconscious grace
As they scrub themselves,
And extend their arms and legs,
Or throw back their heads
To rinse off the lather;
Or bend over
To feel the grateful sting
Of cold water on their backs.
A dozen splendid forms
That flash from pose to pose,
Supple, strong,
Exulting in the freshness and feel
Of the splashing streams—
God-made machines of beauty,
Marking time, waiting
For the pitiless havoc
Of man-made murder.

To a Bunkie, Newly Commissioned

Good-bye, old man, and luck!
The best the army holds
Is none too good for you;
And tho' the Future's moulds
May cast our ways apart,
No bars or stripes can change
Our comradeship of heart.

It's "curtains" for the days
And nights we chummed as one—
It's a final grip as pals
Until the war is done.
Good-bye—with little said.
But what is "black and gold"
So long as blood is red?

The Joy of Days Like These

It's Spring down here in Dixie,
And the glory of its days
Thrills with golden wonder,
As the glinting sunlight plays
Across the pines, uplifting
Against the sweep of blue
Where clouds go winging northwards,
Winging north to you.

It is Spring with a touch of Heaven,
With the age-old thrill of life;
And a million Pans are playing
A melody that's rife
With the lilt of childish laughter,
Afloat in the vibrant breeze.
It's Spring, and the love of loving
Is the joy of days like these.

It's Spring—O, the zest of living
When all roads stretch away
To the green of other places
And lurking holiday;
When the scent of new green grasses
Climbs to my head like wine,
When gipsy dogs are barking,
And I know that you are mine!

To F. K. M.

You are so far away
Whom I would have so near,
You cannot hear me say
What I would tell you, dear.
I cannot clasp your hand
Nor know the gentle stir
Of timid breasts that breathed
Of frankincense and myrrh.

Unknowing of its worth,
As one might stand and hold
The art of Japanese
In a tapestry of gold,
So I, in fragrant days
We filched from war's alarms,
Came to know your love
And had you in my arms.

But had I known as now
The respite were so brief,
And had I known as now
How quickly Chance—the thief—
Would take you from my clasp
And leave me so bereft,
We would have found a way
To circumvent the theft.

Your Letters

Those packets of paper and ink
We haunt the mail man for,
To read each little page
And wish it were a score,
Are just a shadow self;
And though with memory fraught,
When what we want is *you*
The lines we read are naught.

They haven't the thrill of your touch,
They haven't the glow of your lips;
At best they're only words
That you sped from your finger tips;
They haven't the tilt of your hat
Nor the simple charm of your dress,
And what is a paper vow
Or a pen and ink caress?

They haven't the sheen of your hair,
They haven't the joy of your smile—
And though these letters are *you*
And must be *you* for a while,
Some day we'll put away
These ghosts and lock them fast
And hold *you* ever so close—
When we come home at last.



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